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**Gregory V. Short**. *Ground Pounder: A Marine's Journey through South Vietnam, 1968-1969.* North Texas Military Biography and Memoir Series. Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2012. 368 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57441-452-3.

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In 1968, Gregory V. Short joined the U.S. Marines and volunteered to go to Vietnam. Landing in country at the start of the Tet Offensive, he served two tours in four units, including the infamous First Battalion Ninth Marines, dubbed the Walking Dead for its high casualty rates. In *Ground Pounder*, Short recounts his experiences, allowing the reader into the world of a grunt patrolling the hills around Con Thien, Khe Sanh, and A Shau Valley.

In his introduction, Short states that his intentions in writing this memoir were to produce not a historical document, but a personal history of the events as he witnessed them. While it may not have been his proscribed intention, the events he recounts provide a historical account of the battles in which he was involved and echo the sentiments of many grunts who served in Vietnam. Organizing his account in chronological sequence, Short begins with his enlistment in the marines and his boot camp experience, and continues with his arrival in Vietnam and subsequent unit assignments. Since his time in Vietnam, Short has engaged in an extensive study of war and policy, allowing him to present background information, analyze his experiences, and discuss the politics of the war. Utilizing important sources, such as John Prados and Ray Stubbe's *Valley of Decision: The Siege of Khe Sanh* (1991), Robert Pisor's *The End of the Line: The Siege of Khe Sanh* (1982), and numerous other works pertaining to the areas in Vietnam in which he was stationed, Short establishes his work as a valuable tool for academic research. Through his memoir, the general reader will be able to understand the battle experience, and the student of the Vietnam War has access to a wealth of information on the intricacies of the war and the social changes that the men who fought it went through.

*Ground Pounder* is a wonderful account of infantrymen's physical and mental hardships in Vietnam. Perhaps the most important description in Short's account is his discussion of what he terms the "three mental phases of infantrymen." In phase one, an infantryman believes that he is destined to survive the pitfalls of combat. Once he becomes acclimated to his surroundings, he begins perfecting his skill of killing in phase two. At some point in his service, the infantryman enters phase three, in which he has seen too much combat and lost too many close friends and realizes that the longer that a person remains in the bush, the less likely they are to make it out. Through these descriptions, the reader gains insight into the infantryman's changes in worldview brought on by existing in an environment where best friends die painful deaths, previously viewed noncombatants become viable targets, and preconceived acts of immorality become commonplace.

Equally important as this self realization is the disillusionment enlisted personnel felt toward their superiors. In chapter 4, Short discusses the Tet Offensive and shows discrepancies between what the enlisted men fighting the war experienced and what the media was reporting based on reports from senior personnel and the government. He points to General William Westmoreland's proclamation that the enemy was only attacking major cities to conceal their real intention of overrunning the Khe Sanh Combat Base, and that he had intentionally stationed marines there so that he could draw the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) into the open. Short also adds that since the enemy had not been successful and ended up back in their tunnels, the average serviceman was left wondering about the point of the exercise.

While a tenuous relationship existed between enlisted men and officers, so too did a misunderstanding between enlisted men in different fields of operations. There was a clear distinction between infantrymen operating in the bush, or forward area, and other personnel operating in the rear. Men fighting in the bush, in constant danger and present for the horrific scenes of

battle, had trouble connecting with men in the rear, often dubbing them "rear echelon mother fuckers" (REMF), due to their cushy life of working regular hours, eating hot meals, and frequenting the enlisted club. Men in the rear led largely typical military lives where they had regular barracks inspections and wore pressed uniforms, and therefore viewed the men that came in from the bush as raggedy looking and void of normal human character. Having served his first tour in forward units and his second at the rear, Short offers accounts of both. He discusses his feelings of discomfort after arriving back from leave after his first tour and entering his second tour attached to the First Marine Air Wing, stating that being a ground pounder at heart, he was not used to the spit and polish. He viewed everyone at his new post as more involved with keeping their boots clean and saluting everybody than with fighting a war. Although he chose his new assignment, Short recounts the initial hardships that he had in acclimating to his new surroundings, as well as the mutual lack of understanding between himself and the men in his unit.

There are many facets to the experiences young men had serving in Vietnam. Indeed, individual studies on different aspects of those experiences continue to be produced every year. Many veterans of the Vietnam War, both officer and enlisted, have written memoirs of their experiences. Short has definitely added a valuable contribution to those studies with *Ground Pounder*. The intrinsic value of his text lies with the reproduction of major operations during the war that he witnessed. Students of the Vietnam War have difficulty gaining a true understanding of the war experience. Short's memoir begins to fill that gap, as a primary source that can be used as a starting point for future scholarship.

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